

How the CIA can help

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While there is much that can be criticized in the secrets revealed in the Pentagon papers, one agency that comes out of them with a record for calling its shots correctly is the Central Intelligence Agency. As Crocker Snow Jr. pointed out in last Sunday's Globe, it suggests that the last few Presidents should have listened more to the CIA than to the State Department, the Pentagon, the National Security Council and the White House advisers.

For it appears that if they had, there would have been no doubts about President Dien's regime in Saigon; the domino theory would not have been trotted out to justify the war, and the war would not have been escalated.

Why were not the CIA reports given greater credence? The answer may come only with less secrecy in Washington. But perhaps part of the answer lay in the disastrous 1961 invasion the agency ran at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba (for which President Kennedy, nonetheless, took all the blame).

And perhaps another part lies in a deliberate downplaying of the CIA's role. It had been an operational as well as an intelligence agency

when John Foster Dulles was CIA director. But of Pigs, Robert Kennedy told the editors of the New York Times, "The CIA was urged to present options rather than hard recommendations."

It is not publicly known what role if any the CIA played in the futile invasion of Cambodia and the abortive raid on an empty North Vietnamese prison camp. Enough is known about its role in Laos to make it subject to severe criticism, however.

All of this makes more attractive the proposal of Sen. John Sherman Cooper that the CIA share its intelligence estimates with Congress, which passes on its secret budget without knowing, for the most part, where the money goes. This would help Congress reach a judgment on important policy questions.

At a time when Congress is rightly reasserting its responsibility, that would be most helpful. It would be infinitely preferable to having to vote on the basis of limited information designed to support administrative policies.